



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Teton  
National Park

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## Grand Teton National Park News Release

### Park Rangers Rescue Injured Exum Guide from Symmetry Spire

Grand Teton National Park rangers rescued an injured Exum Mountain guide from Symmetry Spire on Saturday afternoon, August 5. The Exum Mountain Guides office contacted the Jenny Lake ranger station at 2:30 p.m. to notify them that an accident involving their guide, Mark Newcomb, age 39, of Jackson, Wyoming, had just occurred. Newcomb was leading two clients on an ascent of the Direct Jensen Ridge of Symmetry Spire when he took an 80-foot fall at approximately 9,600 feet in elevation.

Newcomb was positioned about 100 feet above his clients, and about 300 feet from the top of the Direct Jensen Ridge – on a pitch rated 5.7 on the Yosemite Decimal System. The accident occurred when Newcomb reached for a hand-hold and the block of rock dislodged, causing him to grab a second hold, which also broke off. At the time of the accident, Newcomb was 40 feet above his last point of protection, which held. One of Newcomb's clients was belaying him, which helped buffer Newcomb's fall. The clients slowly lowered him 20 feet to the narrow ledge where they were perched.

Park rangers immediately began to coordinate a highly technical rescue response which included extensive air operations, as well as staging rangers in the vicinity of Symmetry Spire for a potential ground response in the event that weather precluded a helicopter evacuation.

Initially the park's interagency contract helicopter, with three rangers aboard, flew a reconnaissance flight to observe the scene and determine the best approach and technical requirements for the rescue operation. The helicopter then picked up two rangers and inserted them by the short-haul technique onto the vertical rock wall where Newcomb was situated (the short-haul technique is a method by which rangers fly, individually or in pairs, suspended from the helicopter on a double-rope system). These rangers assessed Newcomb's condition and provided emergency medical care. Two additional rangers were also inserted via short-haul to assist in the technical operation. While the helicopter hovered above the scene, the two clients were placed into evacuation suits, then attached to the short-haul rope and flown out. After delivering the clients to Lupine Meadows, the helicopter air-lifted a rescue litter to the accident scene and returned to Lupine Meadows to refuel. Meanwhile, rangers placed Newcomb into the rescue litter and prepared him for the short-haul flight. The helicopter returned to the accident scene and hovered while rangers attached the litter to the short-haul line. Newcomb was flown to Lupine Meadows, arriving at 5:15 p.m. While Newcomb was transported by park ambulance to St. John's Medical Center in Jackson, the helicopter made two additional trips to Symmetry Spire, flying the rangers out in tandem suspended by the short-haul rope. Newcomb was released from the hospital Saturday evening, after treatment for minor injuries, including lacerations, abrasions and bruises.

Rangers commended pilot, John Bourke, of Heli-Express, for his highly skilled and technical flying. Heli-Express of Atlanta, Georgia has the contract for the park's interagency helicopter; the ship is an A-Star. This incident required extensive high elevation flying and hovering adjacent to sheer cliff walls with late afternoon winds, an approaching storm, helicopter rotor wash, and people suspended below the ship. There is no margin for error in this type of rescue flying. Bourke made seven round-trip flights to provide reconnaissance, insert rangers, evacuate clients, evacuate the injured climber, and finally retrieve rangers at the completion of the rescue operation.

This marks the seventeenth major search and rescue operation in Grand Teton National Park this year.

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